

What is the Bottom Line?

Wahner Samuel H. Miller

Michael, it is too late for me to give you the good advice my father in Korea gave me when I was sent to America for college. He said to all his five sons, "Don't be a minister unless you have to be". It sounds negative, but he knew what he was doing--he was setting us free (which to him was turning us over to the Holy Spirit), and he was warning us against drifting into the ministry just because our father was a minister. He was wise. Four of us turned out to be ministers. The one who escaped--we called him "the heathen"--he became a medical missionary.

But you have not escaped ordination. Here you are already ordained. What do I tell you?. Well, I'm going to tell you what Jesus said to his disciples after only three years of training-- no college, no seminary, no Ph.D.--just three years of following Jesus. He quite wisely focussed on Thomas, Thomas the doubter. As usual Thomas interrupted him in his farewell sermon. Jesus was saying good-bye. He began, "Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in me. You know where I am going; you know the way..." And Thomas stops him. "Wait a minute". "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way. And Jesus looks at him. He doesn't argue. Then he simply says, Thomas, "I am the way--I am the way and the truth and the life".

Some people like to stop there. It's so wonderful; it's beautiful-- Jesus, "the way and the truth and the life". And they stop. But Jesus didn't. He added something more, a bottom line, as it were, that some would like to forget. In the unpleasant, divisive infighting going on in our churches we so often hurl incomplete 10-second bytes of wonderful slogans at each other-- Bible verses, or Book of Order. "The church reformed, and always reforming". "God alone is Lord of the conscience". But all too often we leave out the bottom line, the operative part, the defining phrase.

If we leave out Jesus's own bottom line, both of those great statements are true, but very misleading. In the Bible both end with the defining phrase "according to the Scriptures" or its equivalent. "Reform",

yes, but only as it is "according to the Scriptures". "Conscience", yes, but only so far as it is "according to God's Word". God alone is Lord of my conscience, not I.

When Jesus said to Thomas, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life"--he didn't stop, he went on to add these memorable defining words, "No one comes to the Father but by me". It sounds negative, but it is a negative that turns out to be a positive, like "Don't be a minister unless you have to be". And for the church, it's that bottom line that gives the Church its identity.

As long as we dare to call ourselves "Christians", Jesus, who is the Christ in "Christian", must be our bottom line. Protestants are only one part of the community that calls itself Christian. And Presbyterians are only one part of the Protestants. And you feel called to a ministry of mission in one part of the Presbyterian Church, Presbyterians for Renewal.

But what is the bottom line for renewal? It's not to satisfy your conscience. That is God's right; and God, not you, is Lord of your conscience.

And it's not just for reforming a Church. Heaven knows we need reform, a church that is losing 40,000 members a year for the last 30 years. Changing our Book of Order every year won't do it. A Korean pastor said to me, "The trouble with American Presbyterians is that they pay more attention to the Book of Order than to the Bible". The bottom line is "according to the Scriptures".

And renewal is not revolution. Are things so bad for Presbyterians that we should just give up on the church--split it or remove it? I remember Professor Latourette, the mission historian and a stout Baptist saying to our class, "Schism is a sin. But not an unforgivable sin--except to bishops". What would Calvin and Luther say. I think they would agree with Latourette, but only if the bottom line is not "bishops" but "Scripture". "Here I stand", said Luther--on Scripture. And standing on Scripture, Calvin says, (I,iv, 2-3) "it is self-authenticated"...and "persons who, abandoning the Scripture, imagine to themselves some other way of approaching...God, must be ...not so much misled by error as actuated by frenzy".

But breaking away from one imperfect church to start another

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imperfect church is not renewal, it's still a sin. Calvin, (I,xv,3) turns to Scripture for a softer word than revolution for what it means to follow Jesus. Renewal. He turned to Colossians 3:10. Biblical renewal, he said, is the ongoing, the daily renewal of the image of God in a human nature, lost by sin, but restored through Christ by the Holy Spirit. The bottom line for renewal is following Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, "according to the Scripture". It is not reform. Of course we need reform. One day in New Haven the story running around the quad was that the professor of Homiletics had come up to Bainton, the church historian, and said, jokingly, "Roley, how can you know so much about church history and still be a Christian". The answer is, "It's not the Church; it's Jesus Christ, "according to the Scriptures".

"According to the Scriptures". That is the irreplaceable key to renewal. It is in the Charter of the World Council of Churches. It is also in the heart of Korea's Christians. At the height of the recent amazing explosions of church growth in Korea a commission from America came to ask my father what made the Korean churches grow. A part of his answer must have surprised them. They were ready for a long list. But he began with just two reasons, the two factors which he considered most important for Korea's church growth. He said, "Gentlemen" (they were all men), "for fifty years we have lifted up before these people the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit did the rest." The Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Renewal.

You have made a good start, Michael. I am glad you have been called to Presbyterians for Renewal--not to start a revolution, or dictate church reform. Hold up the Word of God before us--from our oldest to the youngest--and only the Holy Spirit can save our beloved Presbyterian Church. No! That is negative, dark and selfish. Where's the joy, the power, the hallelujah. That's not the bottom line. The bottom line for renewal is: let the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship and power of the Holy Spirit be with us all, a church with vision and a mission to the ends of the earth for Christ, "according to the Scriptures". According to the Scriptures. Amen.

-- Samuel Hugh Moffett



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Michael, it is too late for me to give you the good advice my father in Korea gave me when I was sent to America for college. He said to all his five sons, "Don't be a minister unless you have to be". I know that sounds negative, but he knew what he was doing--he was setting us free (which to him meant turning us over to the Holy Spirit), and he was warning us against drifting into the ministry just because our father was a minister. He was a wise man. Four of us turned out to be ministers. The one who escaped--we called him "the heathen"--he became a medical missionary.

But you have not escaped. Here you are already ordained. What do I tell you?. Well, I'm going to tell you what Jesus said to his disciples after only three years of training-- no college, no seminary, no Ph.D.--just three years of following Jesus. He was saying good bye. It was his farewell sermon (John 14-16), and perhaps he quite wisely focussed on Thomas-- Thomas the doubter, Thomas the trouble-maker. And true to form, before Jesus had said more than two sentences, Thomas interrupted him. Jesus had begun, "Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in me. You know where I am going; you know the way..." And Thomas stops him. "Wait a minute". "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way. And Jesus looks at him. He doesn't argue. He simply says, "[Thomas], I am the way--I am the way and the truth and the life".

Some people, reading their Bibles like to stop Jesus again, like Thomas, but not so rudely. They want to stop and dream--it's so wonderful, so beautiful, "the way and the truth and the life". But be careful where you stop Jesus Christ.

In the unpleasant, divisive infighting which seems to go on and on, we often get to hurling short word-bullets at each other, incomplete 10-second bytes of wonderful slogans at each other--incomplete verses of the Bible, or bits of the Book of Order. We Presbyterians are "The church reformed, and always reforming". "God alone is Lord of the conscience". "More light". But all too often we leave out the bottom line, the operative part, the defining phrase.

<sup>are 3 statements</sup>  
They are all true--as far as they go, but they are incomplete, and if left hanging unfinished, they are dangerously misleading half-truths. As originally spoken or written, all three ended with the defining phrase, "according to the Scriptures". "Reformed and reforming yes", yes, but only as it is "according to the Scriptures". "Freedom of conscience", yes, but only so far as it is "according to God's Word". God alone is Lord of our consciences, not we.

*And "More Light" comes from the Puritans, not homosexuals - a quotation from the Mayflower's Governor Bradford's "History of Plymouth Plantation"*

*Source - Milton, Smith & Strivings - p. 1195 - summer of 1630 - 8:21*

"According to the Scripture", when Jesus said to Thomas, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life"--he didn't stop, he went on to add these memorable defining words, "No one comes to the Father but by me". It sounds negative, but it is a negative that turns out to be a positive, like "Don't be a minister unless you have to be". And for the church, it is that bottom line that gives the Church its identity.

It is in the charter phrase of the World Council of Church's Brief Statement of Faith. That is why the Unitarian Church is not a member. As long as we dare to call ourselves "Christians", Jesus, who is the Christ in "Christian", must be our bottom line: Jesus, "according to the Scriptures."

Michael, you have not only been called into the Ministry of the Church and the Sacraments, but also to be Executive Director of Presbyterians for Renewal. What is the bottom line for renewal?

Renewal is not just to satisfy our conscience. Unfettered freedom of conscience is one of the major factors that is destroying the life of our western culture, and discipline in our church. God alone is Lord of the conscience--God, "according to the Scriptures."

And renewal is not reform. Heaven knows we need reform. Our Church is losing 40,000 members a year for the last 30 years. Yes, we need reform, but fighting about how to change our Book of Order every year won't do it. That's like a bandaid or an aspirin for church decline, when what we need is a prescription for church growth. A Korean pastor said to me, "The trouble with American Presbyterians is that they pay more attention to the Book of Order than to the Bible". The bottom line is "according to the Scriptures", even for the Book of Order.



And renewal is not revolution. Are things so bad for Presbyterians that we should just give up on the church--split it or remove it? I remember Professor Latourette, the mission historian and a stout Baptist saying to our class, "Schism is a sin. But not an unforgivable sin--except to bishops". What would Calvin and Luther say. I think they would agree with Latourette, but only if the bottom line is not "bishops" but "Scripture". "Here I stand", said Luther--on Scripture. And standing on Scripture, Calvin says, (I,iv, 2-3) "it is self-authenticated"...[and] "persons who, abandoning the Scripture, imagine to themselves some other way of approaching...God, must be ...not so much misled by error as actuated by frenzy". That's strong language, but no stronger than "no one comes to the Father but by Me".

Not by revolution. Breaking away from one imperfect church to start another imperfect church is not renewal, it's still a sin. Calvin, (I,xv,3) turns to Scripture for a softer word than revolution for what it means to follow Jesus. The word is "renewal". He turned to Colossians 3:10. Biblical renewal, he said quoting Paul, is "putting off the old nature" and "putting on the new nature, in knowledge after the image of its creator". It is the ongoing, daily renewal of the image of God in a human nature, lost by sin, but restored through Christ by the Holy Spirit. That is "according to the Scripture".

Not the Church. For the Church, reformation, but there never is enough reform. We've had it for 2000 years, and look at us. One day in New Haven the story running around the quad was that the professor of Homiletics had come up to Bainton, the church historian, and said, only half-jokingly, "Roley, how can you know so much about church history and still be a Christian". The answer is, "It's not the Church; it's Jesus Christ, "according to the Scriptures".

"According to the Scriptures". That is the irreplaceable key to renewal. It is in the Charter of the World Council of Churches. It is also in the heart of Korea's Christians. At the height of the recent amazing explosions of church growth in Korea a commission from America came to ask my father what made the Korean churches grow. A part of his answer must have surprised them. They were ready for a long list. But he began with just two reasons, the two factors which he considered most important for growth in the Korean churches. He said, "Gentlemen" (they were all men), "for fifty years we have lifted up before these people the Word of God, and the Holy

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You have made a good start, Michael. I am glad you have been called to Presbyterians for Renewal, Hold up the Word of God before us--from our oldest to the youngest--and only the Holy Spirit can save our beloved Presbyterian Church. No! That's no way to end this charge. It is negative, dark and selfish. Where's the joy, the power, the hallelujah. The bottom line for renewal is not a warning, not a judgement but a blessing. And it is "according to scripture", The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship and power of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forever, here and to the ends of the earth, "according to the Scriptures". According to the Scriptures. Amen.

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FINAL (8/13/05)  
with corrections.

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I know

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The difficult disciple made trouble

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POOR DISCUSSION & DIFFERENT OPINIONS TURN INTO ANGRY TIRADES

<sup>Without that all-important</sup> ~~If we leave out~~ Jesus's own bottom line, both of those great statements are true, but very misleading. <sup>They are incomplete. They are "HALF TRUTHS"</sup> In the Bible both end with the defining phrase "according to the Scriptures" or its equivalent. "Reform",



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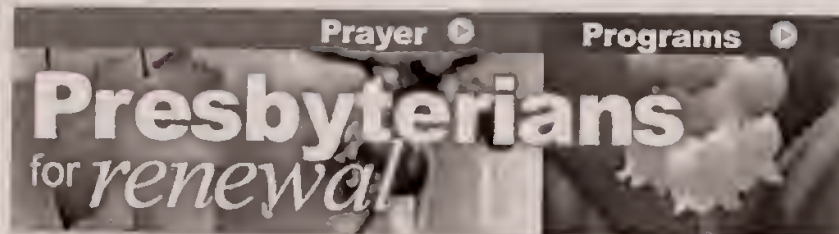
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## Lordship of Jesus, Local License: Responding to the Task Force Report

by Michael R. Walker, PFR Executive Director  
Friday, August 26, 2005

The Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church has delivered to the church a report and some recommendations that require a mixed response. On the one hand, there is much to commend in its theological statement. On the other hand, its most significant polity recommendation is a disappointment, as it would give local governing bodies the license to overlook an individual's clear violations of national ordination standards, thus creating a more rather than less divided church.[1]

The Task Force was created by the 213th General Assembly in 2001 "to lead the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in spiritual discernment of our Christian identity in and for the 21st century." The Task Force was commissioned to deal with issues of Christology, biblical authority and interpretation, ordination standards, and power, being responsible for developing a process and an instrument by which congregations and governing bodies throughout our church might reflect on and discuss the matters that unite and divide Presbyterians. The Task Force is concluding four years of hard work, work for which the entire Presbyterian Church should be grateful. This diverse group has demonstrated that we may have more in common as Presbyterians than we often think. The Task Force has also modeled a style of conversation that is constructive without avoiding conflict, where speech is frank but not devoid of empathy and compassion.

There are some excellent things in the report. The theological prologue makes strong statements on truths that have often been contested in the 20th and 21st centuries. The prologue affirms God's eternal triunity, the full humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the calling of Christians to live lives of holiness and self-denial, and the singular saving Lordship of Christ. It also makes strong statements about biblical authority and makes clear that all ordained officers have an obligation to obey and uphold the constitution of our church. Contrary to the often repeated mantra, "theology divides, polity unites," the Task Force seeks to ground its report, and Presbyterian identity in general, in strong theological claims which bear faithful witness to a faith that is catholic, evangelical and Reformed. The key to the peace, unity and purity of the Church as well as its renewal is Jesus Christ. And the theological affirmations of the Task Force report reflect this truth, as they take seriously the Church's obligation to make an orthodox confession of Christ's Lordship with our lips and our lives.

While these theological affirmations offer what is for the most part a solid statement of the Christian faith, the most significant polity recommendation of the Task Force – a proposed Authoritative Interpretation of G-6.0108 in our *Book of Order* – is disappointing and troubling, as it is not consistent with the report's own theological affirmations, intentions and goals. The proposed Authoritative Interpretation of G-6.0108 is nuanced and complex, and the church must be equally careful in its response to this proposed shift to our ordination policies.[2] In short, this proposed authoritative interpretation would not obviously change our ordination standards, but it would introduce significant changes into the way in which our ordination standards are *applied* by ordaining bodies. It intends to give local governing bodies much wider latitude in the *application* of ordination standards by changing the way in which G-6.0108 relates to other ordination standards, including G-6.0106b. This is somewhat technical, but to understand the Task Force's recommendation it is very important to

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spell things out carefully.

The Authoritative Interpretation proposed by the Task Force presents itself as an explanation of G-6.0108 in the Book of Order.[3] G-6.0108 gives governing bodies the responsibility for discerning whether or not the candidates for ordination or the ordained officers serving in their bodies "adhere to the essentials of the reformed faith and polity." The proposed A.I. apparently seeks to make this standard for holding office *the standard above all others*, the standard into which all others may be collapsed, such that the violation of any other ordination standard is turned into the following question: does this person's violation(s) of the church's ordination standards constitute a violation of the "essentials of the reformed faith and polity"? The ordaining body would have the responsibility to answer that question. In other words, "any departure" from an ordination standard, including the requirement to live in fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness expressed in G-6.0106b, could be deemed an *inessential* departure from reformed faith and polity, and therefore no bar to ordination, at the discretion of the ordaining governing body. To coin a phrase, this A.I. would result in "local license." [4]

To illustrate the change this authoritative interpretation would effect, we can put it this way: at present, a governing body cannot knowingly ordain a practicing homosexual without violating the constitution, even though some do it anyway. This authoritative interpretation would change that, taking the pressure off of governing bodies, because local governing bodies could deem departures from national standards to be inessential departures from reformed faith and polity, at which point they could without violating the constitution ordain a person in violation of G-6.0106b or another currently essential ordination standard. [5]

In order to make G-6.0108 a sort of "totalizing" ordination standard, this A.I. confuses the right to "declare a scruple" or take an exception on a matter of teaching with the right to disobey an explicit national polity standard. The church has chosen not to spell out a list of "the essentials of reformed faith and polity," and so G-6.0108 gives presbyteries the responsibility of discerning those things that the national church has not spelled out. This authoritative interpretation, on the other hand, would allow local governing bodies to effectively set aside that which the national church *has* spelled out, including the fidelity-chastity requirement (G-6.0106b). [6]

Herein lies the real danger. While the larger Church has declared its discernment of the Holy Spirit with an increasing voice, this AI would permit lower governing bodies to act as if they are not part of the body of the Christ but rather separate, disembodied entities. This is a direct violation of the Historic Principles of Church Government, G-1.0400. It is also a mechanism for ultimately making the larger Church nothing more than a dog composed of many wagging tails.

It should be noted that, in the end, it is the wording of an A.I. that has the power of law, not the rationale given for the A.I. by those who have proposed it. The above explanation of the effect of the A.I. is assuming that it would actually have the force to accomplish what the Task Force's rationale for it assumes it will accomplish. This, however, is not necessarily the case. [7] It would likely take several years of wrangling in the church courts to determine the meaning of even this authoritative interpretation. [8] If the Task Force's recommendation is passed by the General Assembly, it would have the effect of increasing court battles and adding confusion, just at the time when we need peace and clarity.

It was noted above that this recommendation from the Task Force does not respect the spirit of the constitutional manner in which we as Presbyterians determine the boundaries of our own community, because it could allow local ordaining bodies to effectively set aside national constitutional standards. It also runs contrary to our constitutional process in that it has the potential of introducing significant changes to the way our constitutional standards function without requiring a vote of the presbyteries through the constitutional process. (An AI can be passed simply by the vote of one General Assembly, because it is not technically a part of the constitution.) Passing the A.I. would in effect do an end run around the will of the church thrice determined, by increasing margins, through the constitutional process and votes by the presbyteries (i.e. the establishment and maintenance of G-6.0106b). In short, the



intentions of this AI are not in keeping with the spirit of Presbyterian polity, and it is difficult to see how disenfranchising our more local governing bodies from this decision will serve the peace of the church.

It is appropriate to say a word here regarding the Task Force's recommendation that the whole church engage in a process of discernment similar to the one the Task Force itself utilized. Indeed, the Task Force has done a good job showing the church how to take a step beyond our present polarization by having honest, peaceful conversations, where we can move beyond sound bytes, share our different views, and do so in a spirit of peace rather than rancor. And they have given the larger church some resources to do the same. Yet their polity recommendation does not empower the church to use the resources they have given us. Rather, their proposed Authoritative Interpretation presumes an answer to the very question that the processes they recommend are supposed to help the church answer. Their recommendation could have the effect of depriving the church of a chance to use their material and reach its own conclusion.[9]

Additionally, we must seek the peace, unity, and purity of the church through a common pursuit of the Lord's will. The Task Force showed us how to have the conversation, which is a crucial first step. But in their own efforts they seem to have gone from having the conversation, sharing their different views, to then making a suggestion that would legitimize a variety of practices. But to pursue the Lord's will together we need to be able to discern whether or not this diversity is healthy for the church, i.e. we need to move beyond sharing different views into evaluating those views. This is what the Task Force most needed to show us how to do. And this is what they did not do for us. So we are grateful that they showed us the first step; we ought to emulate it, have the conversation, and while we seek the Lord's will together we ought not presume that the answer to one of our most pressing questions is a different answer than the church has given time and again throughout history and in the present. We ought not presume that homosexual practice is in certain contexts consistent with scriptural teaching and therefore a practice we ought to allow our ordained leaders to engage in. If we are to follow Jesus Christ "as he is attested to us in Holy Scripture" (Barmen Declaration), then we must together engage the Scriptures to discern the will of God revealed there, and have the courage to maintain and apply standards for our common life that reflect the teachings therein.

As we pursue a culture of conversation in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in keeping with the Task Force's own recommendation that we peacefully engage those who are different from us, a much better alternative to the proposed A.I. on G-6.0108 would be a ten year moratorium on proposing changes to G-6.0106b and an admonition to ordaining bodies to seek the peace, unity, and purity of the church by abiding by the constitutional standards of the church. This will create the peaceful space to have the conversation, share our different views, *and* evaluate them in light of the teachings of Holy Scripture and our desire to exalt Jesus Christ as Lord of all.

In summary, taken at face value there are excellent elements in the Task Force's report: that we have a strong theological foundation to our common life, that we are called to confess Jesus Christ as Lord of all, to abide by the teachings of the Scriptures, and to live in harmony within the boundaries set by our own church community. And there is, on the other hand, a bad aspect to the report, namely that their polity recommendation is inconsistent with those excellent elements, and it would short-circuit the very process of further discernment that they have proposed for the wider church.

As the church responds to the Task Force's report and recommendations, it is important that we take seriously the best aspects of the report, and that we do not allow their significance to be diminished by the unfortunate polity recommendation. On the contrary, we should respond by living into the best aspects of the report, together confessing Jesus Christ as Lord of all, together seeking and obeying the Lord's will expressed in Holy Scripture, sharpening one another as iron sharpens iron, and having the courage to pursue the truth in concerted conversation, not compromise.

(Note: to respond to this article, [click here](#) and scroll to the bottom of the page.

## Footnotes:

[1] Note that this response to the Task Force, while carefully considered, is also initial, given the fact the report includes some complex recommendations that will need to continue to be carefully weighed.

[2] An Authoritative interpretation (AI) is "an interpretation of *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* that carries the authority of the General Assembly and is binding on the governing bodies of the church" (<http://www.pcusa.org/acc/interp.htm>.)

[3] It certainly appears as though this Authoritative Interpretation does not faithfully "interpret" or spell out the meaning of G-6.0108 but rather reinvents G-6.0108 and gives it a meaning alien to its original intention. Perhaps ironically, the initial intention of G-6.0108 was to *restrict* ordination, particularly to prevent the ordination of those who disagreed with the ordination of women, which the church determined to be an essential of reformed polity (see Maxwell/Kenyon decision of the GAPJC). In all likelihood, this Authoritative Interpretation would overturn the famous Kenyon decision regarding women's ordination, making the ordination of women an inessential aspect of reformed polity. This is an area for further careful consideration, for it would constitute repentance on the part of the whole denomination – repentance for having forced out of our community those called to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament who appealed to freedom of conscience with respect to their objection to the ordination of women. We cannot help but note the irony of this proposal in light of the fact that we are this year celebrating 50 years of the ordination of women in the Presbyterian Church.

[4] It is sort of a "plenary indulgence" covering all polity and theology sins! In fact, we have to ask if there are any standards for ordination of any kind that a presbytery could not set aside. This is not, technically, what some have called "local option," because local governing bodies are not hereby allowed to set their own standards. Nor is it "local application," which is a fair term for our current ordination policies, where local governing bodies "apply" the national standards. Rather, it is something akin to "local license," because it would give local governing bodies the license to overlook violations of the standards, which is hardly "applying" them.

[5] It may be helpful to point out here that "taking the pressure off" of governing bodies who seek to ordain persons in violation of G-6.0106b may be the most significant change introduced by this Authoritative Interpretation. Some governing bodies already ordain such persons in violation of the constitution, so it is not as though this authoritative interpretation would introduce the practice. It would, however, bring that practice into conformity to the constitution, embolden certain ordaining bodies to continue or begin the practice, and as a result it would increase the number of unchaste ordained officers in the church. To put it very plainly, this proposed Authoritative Interpretation will give sessions and presbyteries freedom under our Constitution to ordain self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this is, in fact, the reason for proposing this A.I.

[6] In 2001, the GAPJC heard a case known as the Londonderry Decision. Here, a session had declared that it did not see how it could implement G-6.0106b since they thought that it contradicted other provisions of the Book of Order and was not essential to the Reformed faith. They then went on to declare that they would not comply with G-6.0106b. Their presbytery refused to take action regarding their declaration. The GAPJC ruled that every provision of the Constitution must be read with force and that the presbytery had to act.

Although the Task Force has declared, in their rationale (lines 1362-1365), that the proposed AI would not alter anything about G-6.0106b, the effect of elevating G-6.0108, does give a governing body the ability to denude a portion of the Constitution from having force by declaring that a departure from it is not an essential of the Reformed faith or polity. In other words, the proposed Authoritative Interpretation

could conceivably overturn the crucial Londonberry Decision of the GAPJC.

[7] The key question is the following: Given section 3b of the A.I., would the clearly declared voice of the larger Church regarding manner of life be required or locally optional?

[8] If the AI does not, as the TF rationale claims, trump any AI or GAPJC decision, which has the force of an AI, then the word "any" in 3b of the AI is difficult to understand on its face. The functional result of "any" in 3b of the AI is that all considerations of a candidate are measured against whether or not something is an essential of the Reformed faith or polity. While there are clearly some that will and some that will not hold certain manner of life practices as essential to the Reformed faith, the real question is whether or not the AI will allow a tectonic shift in our polity by allowing someone, along with an approving governing body, to declare a scruple regarding a practice proscribed by the constitution. This is truly a slippery inch along a very dangerous slope. For a lower governing body to be able to ignore the clear will of an increasing majority regarding a particular proscribed manner of life is for that governing body to selectively upend the Historic Principles of Church Government, G-1.0400. Thus, while the TF asserts that the AI is a return to historic Presbyterianism, it actually undercuts the core of what makes us Presbyterian.

[9] Of course, the church has, several times over, reached its conclusion on the most controversial issue of the ordination of practicing homosexuals. But given that there is a very vocal minority in the church who disagrees with the majority, creating a culture of conversation about this issue would be a positive step.

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